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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BOGOTA 000085

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TAGS: [PTER](#) [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [PINR](#) [PINS](#) [MOPS](#) [CO](#) [FARC](#)

SUBJECT: SENIOR FARC LEADER SIMON TRINIDAD IN CUSTODY: GOC

INTEREST IN EXTRADITION TO THE U.S.

Classified By: Ambassador William B. Wood for reasons 1.5 (b) and (d)

Summary

1. (C) On January 2, Ecuadorian authorities arrested Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) commander Ricardo Ovidio Palmera Pineda alias "Simon Trinidad." He is now in Colombia, where he faces over 50 counts of terrorism and other serious crimes. Palmera, who played a key role in managing FARC finances and is implicated in several high-profile terrorist incidents, is the highest-ranking FARC commander ever to be captured. His capture is a major political victory for President Uribe and demonstrates the importance of effective security cooperation between Colombia and its neighbors. The GOC would like to extradite Palmera to the U.S. End Summary.

Ecuador-Colombian Cooperation

2. (C) On January 2, Ecuadorian authorities arrested Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) commander Ricardo Ovidio Palmera Pineda alias "Simon Trinidad," in a popular tourist district of Quito. Palmera was allegedly in Quito to receive treatment for prostate cancer. The Ecuadorian National Police (ENP) had been tracking his movements for several weeks. After appearing before an Ecuadorian judge, Palmera was turned over to Colombian authorities and transported to Bogota, where he faces a total of 59 charges of terrorism, kidnapping, and drug trafficking. The GOC was fully aware of the Ecuadorian operation and, prior to the arrest, provided Ecuadorian officials with a positive identification of Palmera. Contrary to press reports, an informant did not provide Colombian military authorities with information on Palmera's whereabouts; the ENP planned most of the operation independently of Colombian authorities.

Who is "Simon Trinidad"?

3. (C) Palmera, more commonly known as "Simon Trinidad," is the most senior FARC commander ever captured. Although not a member of the seven-member FARC Secretariat, Palmera was an influential member of the FARC's General Staff ("Estado Mayor"), a decision-making body ranking directly below the Secretariat that administers most of the FARC's political, strategic, and operational activities. Palmera -- who holds a university degree in economics and hails from a wealthy cattle-ranching family in the department of Cesar -- helped manage FARC finances and drug trafficking operations.

4. (C) Palmera is believed to have been directly involved in several high profile terrorist incidents, including the kidnapping and murder of former Minister of Culture Consuelo Araujo in September 2001 and the deaths in May 2002 of over 100 civilians who took refuge in a church during a clash between the FARC and paramilitary forces in the town of Boyaja, Choco department. The 53-year-old Palmera has been an active member of the FARC for nearly 20 years and gained public prominence from his role as a hard-nosed FARC negotiator during peace negotiations with the government of President Andres Pastrana from 1998-2002. Palmera did not play a major role in planning FARC combat operations; his absence is unlikely to hurt the group's military capacity.

Public Relations Coup

5. (C) Palmera's capture is a political victory for Uribe, who has publicly pledged to kill or capture leaders of Colombia's illegal armed groups before the end of his term. Colombian media have touted the arrest as the most important blow to the FARC in recent memory, and it should temporarily satisfy the public's growing impatience to see the GOC achieve a major victory against the insurgent group. Palmera's arrest also demonstrates the importance of close security cooperation between the GOC and officials in neighboring countries, where FARC leaders often go for relaxation.

Extradition

6. (C) Senior GOC officials, including President Uribe, have asked that the U.S. consider requesting the extradition of Palmera. They obviously would prefer to see him secure in a U.S. jail than processed in the sometimes unreliable Colombian judicial system. Their requests

have had a note of urgency to them. At this time, however, Palmera doe not face criminal charges in the U.S. The Embassy is unaware of any pending investigations against this well-known narco-terrorist by U.S. law enforcement agencies.

WOOD